



## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS regarding Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), or "Mad Cow Disease"

### *Q: What is BSE/"Mad Cow Disease"?*

A: BSE is a degenerative neurological disease caused by an aberrant protein called a prion. It is in the family of diseases—all caused by prions—referred to as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, or TSEs. It's important to note that TSEs are not communicable diseases—they do not spread easily like viruses.

### *Q: What is my family's risk from the recent case of BSE discovered in Washington State?*

A: There is virtually no risk to Minnesota families. USDA remains confident in the safety of the U.S. food supply. Scientists tell us that there is no evidence to demonstrate that meat from muscle cuts or whole muscle meats that come from animals infected with BSE are at risk of containing prions that are the causative agent of the disease.

### *Q: How is BSE spread in cattle?*

A: Cattle can become infected with BSE by eating feed contaminated with the infectious BSE agent. This is why in 1997 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration prohibited the use of most protein from mammals in the manufacture of animal feed intended for cows and other ruminants. For more information on the feed ban, please visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's website at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).

### *Q: How does USDA's surveillance system for BSE work?*

A: The discovery of this positive case of BSE is a result of USDA's aggressive and targeted surveillance program for the disease. While unfortunate, this detection is an indication that USDA's surveillance and detection program is working as it was designed to work.

USDA inspects animals at slaughter facilities using scientific information gathered during previous BSE outbreaks in the United Kingdom and other countries showing which animals are at the greatest risk of harboring the BSE agent. In 2002, USDA tripled testing levels for BSE surveillance, and in 2003 testing reached an all-time high well above that of similar countries around the world.

We already have the safest food supply in the world. USDA has recently enacted several new safeguards to make it even safer. For more information visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

### *Q: Is there a phone number consumers can call with questions about meat products?*

A: Consumers with food safety questions can phone the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline. The hotline is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time), Monday through Friday. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.